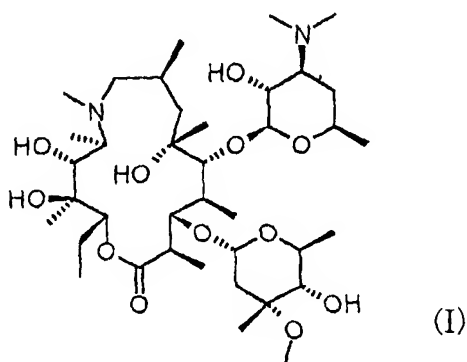


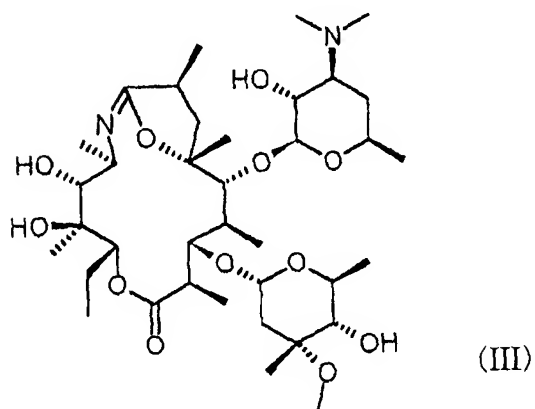
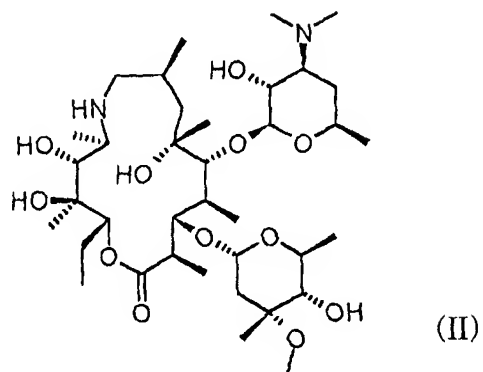
AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (original): A method of preparing azithromycin of formula (I) comprising the steps of: (a) reducing 6,9-imino ether of formula (III) dissolved in methanol with 5 to 7 mole equivalents of NaBH_4 at -20 to -10°C , treating the reaction mixture with an acidic aqueous acetone solution of citric acid, and adjusting the solution pH to 10.5 to 12.0 to obtain a crystalline hydrate of 9-deoxo-9a-aza-9a-homoerythromycin A of formula (II); and (b) N-methylating the compound of formula (II) prepared in step (a) with an aqueous formaldehyde-formic acid mixture in an organic solvent:





2. (original): The method of claim 1, wherein citric acid is used in an amount ranging from 1 to 20 mole equivalents based on 1 mole of 6,9-imino ether of formula (III).

3. (original): The method of claim 1, wherein the pH of the acidic solution is in the range of 2.0 to 3.0.

4. (original): The method of claim 1, wherein the amount of acetone in the aqueous acetone solution is in the range of 1 to 5 ml per 1 g of the compound of formula (III), and the water to acetone volume ratio is in the range of 1 to 4.

5. (original): The method of claim 1, wherein the organic solvent used in step (b) is selected from the group consisting of dichloromethane, chloroform, carbon tetrachloride, 1,2-dichloroethane, methanol, ethanol, isopropanol, acetone, ethylmethylketone, isobutylmethylketone, methyl acetate, ethyl acetate, isopropyl acetate and a mixture thereof.

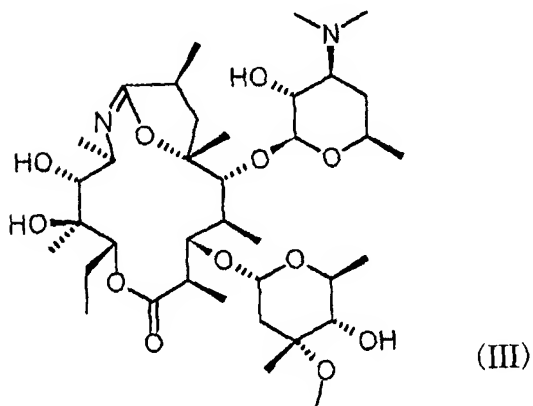
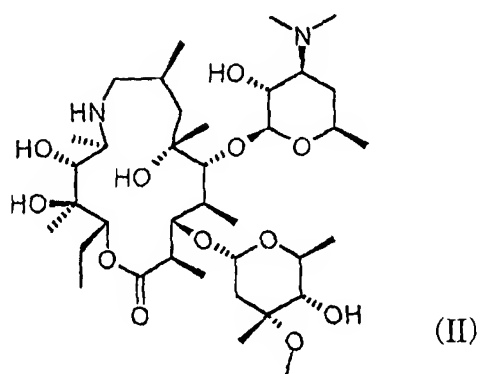
6. (original): The method of claim 1, wherein the amounts of formic acid and formaldehyde used are each independently in the range of 1 to 3 mole equivalents per 1 mole of the compound of formula (II).

7. (canceled).

8. (canceled).

9. (currently amended): A method of preparing ~~the crystalline hydrate of claim 7a~~ crystalline hydrate of 9-deoxo-9a-aza-9a-homoerythromycin A of formula (II) comprising the steps of: (i) reducing 6,9-imino ether of formula (III) dissolved in methanol with 5 to 7 mole

equivalents of NaBH_4 at -20 to -10°C , (ii) treating the reaction mixture with an acidic aqueous acetone solution of citric acid, and (iii) adjusting the solution pH to 10.5 to 12.0:



10. (original): The method of claim 9 which further comprises the step of recrystallizing the crystalline hydrate from a mixture of water and an organic solvent selected from acetone, methanol and acetonitrile.

11. (original): The method of claim 10, wherein the organic solvent is used in an amount ranging from 1 to 2 ml per 1 g of the crystalline hydrate, and the water to organic solvent volume ratio is in the range of 1 to 4.